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Mathée Family Statement Regarding the Public Release of the Harding/Phillips Collection by The Library of Congress

Carrie Fulton Phillips is our direct ancestor and it is our endeavor to have history judge her on fact, not theory or untruth. With that, we ask historical scholars of this era to be cognizant of the extent of misinformation, distortions and speculation paraded as fact surrounding this woman and this subject. A prime example of this is the theory that not only Carrie but her daughter Isabelle were involved in espionage under the direction of the German government. To our knowledge, there is no proof of this. Further, this subject was investigated and/or researched by two United States government agencies finding no evidence of collusion, merely two women vocal in expressing their pro-German sentiment. Another popularly held, yet false notion is that there are no living descendants of Carrie Phillips.

A further area of concern to us is the portrayal of how Carrie handled these letters during her lifetime. Even well after the death of President Warren Harding, and when there were no “alleged” pay-offs being made, Carrie kept her collection of letters concealed, protecting the legacy of this president. It was only after she lost control of these letters due to old age and infirmity, that they came to light. While her correspondence might have shown a certain willingness to cast him in a negative light as a means of getting her way, in fact, this less than perfect woman never did, intending instead to take the letters to her grave. Perhaps this stands in testament to her feelings for this man.

While we were not acquainted with Carrie, in our youth we certainly knew her daughter, our grandmother, Isabelle Phillips Mathée and can assure any and all that she was a woman of grace and honor. Isabelle spent her life married to a man she adored and fully supported. She claimed no knowledge of her mother’s affair until confronted with the existence of the misappropriated letters from her mother’s estate, which are being discussed today. To her Warren Harding was a close family friend and the revelation of this adulterous affair was crushing. When this burst into national attention in the 1960’s she was ill with a respiratory condition that would soon cut her life short and through this she persevered with dignity and determination. Isabelle, in coordination with the Harding family, sought to establish ownership and gain possession of her mother’s assemblage of documents to prevent there untimely publication and so that the originals could be transferred to the Hardings with the understanding that they then would be sealed until well after the death of all involved.

If the decision was Isabelle’s alone she would have burned the letters. One might then ask what the motivation for her actions was. Despite “common knowledge” to the contrary,

the tie between Warren Harding and the Phillips family was strong until his death in 1923, as documented in correspondence we offer here today. She honored his memory by working with his family on the disposition of these documents so that they might do the most good and the least harm.

Knowing that this body of papers would eventually be made public, Isabelle passed on to her heirs, correspondence, documents and personal notes related to the subject. We as a family, have remained silent until the unsealing of the Harding/Phillips collection. Upon this milestone we feel it appropriate to share these documents passed down to us, to be known as the Phillips/Mathée Collection, so that a more accurate historical record can be achieved.

We would like to thank the team of professionals at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress for their work on this collection of important correspondence and for their efforts to provide access to accurate, complete and balanced information. The research and investigation into this subject has been extremely thorough and has brought more clarity to this story for any and all to understand.

Respectfully,
The Mathée Family

*Prepared for July 22, 2014 discussion at the
Library of Congress*